

as in *pulpa*: also, as far as can be judged on worn specimens, the mantle is more vinous and may be less patterned. They may also be ecologically distinct for *williamsi* is known only from Marsabit and the Didd Galgalla lava desert 36 miles to the north, while *pulpa* was collected in rather less arid country.

### Conclusions

There is reason to regard *M. pulpa* (of which *candida* is a synonym) is specifically distinct from both *M. cantillans* and *M. williamsi* and it should provisionally be regarded as such until further field study and collecting provide adequate data on which to assess both the taxonomic and ecological status of the three larks.

TABLE OF MEASUREMENTS

(where published measurements differ from mine they are given in brackets).

	Wing		Bill		Tail	
	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀
<i>M. c. marginata</i> 9♂ 6♀ (Abyssinia & Kenya)	77-81	75-78	14-15	13.5-15	46-50	46-49
<i>M. williamsi</i> 3♂ 1♀	84	83	15	15	52-55 (56)	50 (54)
<i>M. pulpa</i> type	85 (84)		14.5 (14)		54 (60.5)	
type of <i>candida</i>	81 + (80) (moult)		14 (13.5)		54 (55.5)	

## A note on the Sand Crab (*Ocypode* sp.) as a predator of birds in South Africa

by DEREK M. COMINS

Received 10th March, 1961

Captain Pitman (1957, 91) refers to two "kinds of crabs which have been seen to attack young birds and pick the skeletons clean, namely racing crabs or sand crabs, two species of which, *Ocypoda cordimana* and *O. ceratophthalmus* (sic) are common on East African shores".

A specimen of a sand crab (EL. 128 ♂, *O. ceratophthalmus* (Pallas)) was collected by Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer and Mr. G. G. Smith, of the East London Museum, at about 11 a.m. on the 17th May, 1953 at Mboynte (indicated as Emboty on certain maps) near Lusikisiki on the Pondoland coast. The crab was found attempting to drag a dead female adult Cape Rock Thrush (*Monticola rupestris* (Vicillot)) into its burrow which was situated in beach sand just above high tide mark. The bird was not decomposed; it was skinned and prepared as a museum specimen that evening. The bird and crab now compose an exhibit on display at the East London Museum.

There is no proof that the sand crab had actually caught the Cape Rock Thrush. It should be noted that the Cape Rock Thrush is known to occur "right down to the seashore" at least in the southern Cape (McLachlan and Liversidge: 1957, 296) which indicates that the bird at Mboynte had not necessarily arrived *in situ* as tide drift. A well authenticated report of a sand crab having been observed to catch and kill a bird would be of great interest and worthy of publication. Barnard (1950, 87) gives the distribution of *O. ceratophthalmus* as "Mauritius, east coast of Africa to Red Sea,

Indo-Pacific''. Workers in these localities are urged to publish any observations of predation by sand crabs on birds.

#### Bibliography:

- Barnard, K. H. 1950. "Descriptive Catalogue of South African Decapod Crustacea (Crabs and Shrimps)", *Ann. S. Afr. Mus.*  
 McLachlan, G. R. and Liversidge, R. 1957. *Roberts Birds of South Africa.*  
 Pitman, C. R. S. 1957. "Further notes on Aquatic Predators of Birds", *Bull. B.O.C.* 77, 6 (1957), 89.

## Nile Crocodiles *Crocodylus niloticus* versus Spurwing Goose *Plectropterus gambensis*

by CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

*Received 18th February, 1961*

In the River Nile, in the Murchison Falls National Park in northern Uganda, a flightless (moulting) female spurwing goose took to the water on the approach of a boat. Immediately, a crocodile already in shallow water made for the bird at speed, swimming on the surface with the head just showing. The bird saw the crocodile's approach and started to flap along the surface. Other crocodiles began to converge on the goose from all directions. The crocodile's swimming speed at the surface was faster than the goose and each time one closed with her she dived, changed direction under water and surfaced some twenty yards away. When she re-surfaced the crocodiles were slow to see her, but when they did so, immediately they started to close in again. Eventually there were eight crocodiles hunting her. One crocodile managed to approach close and then dived, only to surface again immediately behind the bird, which too had dived, just in time, and eluded its pursuer under water. Usually the goose dived when a crocodile had closed to within fifteen or twenty yards, and the crocodile then did not bother to dive. Finally, the goose made its way to deep water in mid stream and the crocodiles gave up the chase. Their reluctance to continue may have been influenced by the proximity of the boat.

### XIII Congressus Internationalis Ornithologicus

The Thirteenth International Ornithological Congress will convene at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, from 17th to 24th June, 1962.

The official announcement and application for membership in the Congress are now ready for distribution. Interested persons who have not already done so should send their names and addresses to the Secretary General *as soon as possible*.

A small fund has been obtained to provide partial support for the travel of a few persons coming from outside North America. Application forms will be sent to persons requesting them. (Citizens of the United States and Canada are not eligible.)

All applications for membership, travel grants and places on the programme should be returned to the Secretary General *before 1st December, 1961*.

Charles G. Sibley, Secretary General  
 Fernow Hall, Cornell University  
 Ithaca, New York, U.S.A.

SEP 1961

PURCHASED